

## BOOK REVIEW

ANTONY WILD. 2005 (American Edition). **Coffee: A Dark History**. (ISBN 0-393-06071-3, hbk.). W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, New York, New York 10110, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.wwnorton.com, 1-800-233-4830, 1-800-458-6515 fax). \$25.95, 323 pp., 8 plates (7 color, 1 b/w), 6 3/8" × 9 1/2".

*Contents.*—Preface, Prologue, **1)** The Way We Live Now, **2)** Origins, **3)** Enter the Dragon, **4)** The Mocha Trade, **5)** Coffee and Societies, **6)** The Fall of Mocha, **7)** Slavery and the Coffee Colonies, **8)** The Continental System and Napoleon's Alternative to Coffee, **9)** Napoleon and St Helena, **10)** Slavery, Brazil, and Coffee, **11)** The Great Exhibition, **12)** Harrar and Rimbaud: the Cradle and the Crucible, **13)** Modern Times, **14)** Coffee, Science, and History, **15)** The Battle of the Hemispheres, **16)** Fair Trade, **17)** Espresso: the Esperanto of Coffee, **18)** The Heart of Darkness. Coda, Appendix: The Find at Kush, Selected Further Reading, Index.

*Coffee: A Dark History* begins with an ominous tone in the prologue and downshifts to an outright disastrous tone by the first chapter. Here, author Antony Wild bemoans the plight of small Third World coffee growers as pawns in the greedy clutches of the world's advanced, mega-consumer countries. Anticipating a politically charged assault in the second chapter, I was delighted when Wild turned his engaging writing style to the very roots of coffee history. He begins with the evolutionary development of humans as a species and brings in some very interesting coffee-related possibilities. His jumping off point for such musing is the supposed origins of humans and coffee in the area now known as Ethiopia. Taking history a little farther along, he even puts forth coffee as the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden. He goes on to hypothesize coffee's earliest possible use and cultivation by various cultures as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He also sprinkles in botanical/scientific facts about coffee along the way.

The first two-thirds of the book continues and expands on the role of coffee in political struggles, colonialism, imperialism, economics and culture, and social development. Botanical and other scientific tidbits are always present. This book is a great way to read through world history as a very organic, intertwined story. The last third of the book resumes with the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and takes you through to present day. Though the dark history of coffee is a theme throughout, its evilness, according to Wild, has achieved epic proportions in the present day. And though the author, once a coffee trader himself, eschews the coffee giants and predicts world catastrophe around coffee trade atrocities, he does include a slightly positive chapter on fair trade coffee. Despite coffee's dark history, Wild has written a fascinating, well-researched, and utterly intriguing treatise.—Robert J George, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 500 East 4th Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76102-4025, U.S.A.